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Indulge Your Taste Buds and Your Health

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(NO COMMENTS)

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Chef Jud Flynn, senior executive chef of On-Site Culinary Solutions, watches as Culinary Specialist 1st Class Tony Johnson, attached to Naval Station Norfolk, inspects a pan of scratch-styled cooked yams during a 5-day culinary training course. The course is for Navy culinary specialists to relearn basic cooking principles to implement more healthy and nutritious meals into base galleys in the mid-Atlantic region. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Molly A. Burgess/Released)

Food is fuel. But food is also so much more than that. It can provide comfort (chicken soup when you have a cold), and pleasure (ice cream on your birthday). But if you've ever tried to stick to a diet low in fat and calories you know food can also be frustrating.

For our health, we know we can't just make our food choices based on what tastes, or makes us feel good. While it is no secret that eating healthy isn't easy, the reasons why are complex. But understanding why we eat the way we do is the first step in changing our dietary habits in favor of healthier ones.

The most obvious reason for why we eat the way we do is because we enjoy it; whether for taste, or for how it makes us feel. Food can provide comfort both emotionally and physically. Many choose food based on what they consumed while growing up, thus nourishing their emotional association with food as well as satisfying physical hunger. It is


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not uncommon to hear people say “my whole family is big” or “most of my family members are thin.” When you dig a little further usually the size of family members correlates with their family’s lifestyle of food choices and activity levels.

Another possible explanation for why we eat the way we do is the accessibility of high calorie foods. Consuming fat is vital to our survival and brain function. Historically, high fat and calorie dense foods were not as plentiful as they are today. Because those high fat and calorie dense foods were scarce, survival of our bodies adapted by storing calories when possible, and the most efficient nutrient that can be stored is fat.

Today we no longer need to hunt or forage for our food. Since cheap, high calorie foods are abundant and readily available, subsequently we have the opportunity to overindulge, which has led to a nation of rising overweight and obese persons. The ever increasing weight and waistlines are in turn increasing risk of chronic disease conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, some cancers, and hypertension.

Tips and tricks for making healthy foods taste better:

It is easier to eat healthy if we have the knowledge and skills to make healthy food taste good and have it readily available. Good nutrition or the term “healthy eating” is unfortunately associated with poor taste and bland foods; however this doesn’t have to be the case. Being creative in tempting your taste buds is part of good nutrition. So what can you do?

- **Add seasonings to your foods** – there are many low-sodium and salt-free options that enhance the flavor of food while maintaining the healthful benefits of the food item. Herbs and spices like cinnamon, ginger, oregano, and thyme are fairly common and add lots of flavor. [Check out HPW’s spice table](#) for herb combinations you can make from what you have on hand (such as Cajun or Indian spice blends).
- **Add grilled, roasted, or sautéed vegetables** (such as garlic, onions, carrots, peppers or celery), or egg to high fiber brown rice to stir up some exciting flavors.
- **Try reducing the amount of salt** you put in your foods over time. If you cut back gradually you’ll hardly notice.
- **Try using hummus or avocado** instead of mayo on your sandwiches and salads. A tablespoon of either adds flavor and healthy fats without excessive calories.
- **Buy pre-seasoned frozen vegetables.** Just avoid those with sauces high in fat and salt.
- **Make salsas with fruits and vegetables.**
- **Have healthy snacks on hand.** Keep nut butters such as peanut or almond butter (careful of portion size), low-fat string cheese, cut vegetables and fruit, and boiled eggs on hand.
- **Add healthy toppings** like fruit, almonds, and low-fat granola to add to things like Greek yogurt or low-fat cottage cheese.
- **Be creative and try new things** to avoid getting into a food rut. If you usually bake, try rotating cooking methods to include sautéing or grilling. For additional inspiration on cooking methods, check out [HPW’s mastering flavorful cooking fact sheet](#). Next time you’re at the store, buy something you’ve never tried (perhaps farro as a whole grain, making kale chips, or baking chick peas with Cajun seasoning) to add rich sources of vitamins, minerals and fiber to your diet.

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- **Give it time.** Finding new favorites takes time. Experiment and have fun with new foods and flavors.

Other tips and tricks for eating better

Moderation, balance, and variety are the key for sustaining a healthy diet. It really is about doing a little bit of everything: getting enough protein, carbohydrate, and choosing healthy fats to keep or return yourself to a good state of health. To achieve balance and moderation, it helps to be practical and realistic.

- **To be successful you have to plan.** As they say, if you fail to prepare, you're preparing to fail. If you're not planning your meals for the week, you're less likely to pay attention to what you're consuming, therefore plan to have what you need available to succeed.
- **If you're going out to eat, look online first,** many restaurants not only post their menus, but also post their nutrition information. And if you want to splurge, plan ahead and adjust your eating and activity levels to strike that balance.
- **Make sure you have healthy foods available.** Use fast prep equipment (such as indoor table-top grills, slow cookers, and immersion blenders) and prepare your meals in advance (defrost meats the night before, or cook in batches and freeze half for convenient meals later in the week).
- **Pay attention to serving size.** Portion control – and hunger control – is always important no matter what you're eating. Excess consumption of anything (carbohydrate, protein, or fat) is stored as fat. To help with hunger control, drink plenty of water. Thirst is often mistaken for hunger, so try drinking a glass of water both before and after your meal.
- **Don't go more than 4-5 hours without eating.** If you allow yourself to become too hungry, you will most likely overeat. Additionally, shopping at the grocery store in a state of hunger will most likely lead to purchasing more groceries and more high calorie food items – affecting your wallet as well as your waistline.
- **Know what you're putting in your body.** The FDA is changing nutrition labels in the hopes of making them easier to read and understand. Check out the proposed changes [here](#). For now, when reading the labels make sure that you are also paying attention to serving size as this has significant impact on the number of calories you actually consume. For more information on how to read a nutrition label, click [here](#).
- **Be aware of the things you drink.** The average person consumes 400 calories a day from drinks alone. Drink water and other calorie-free or low-calorie beverages like unsweetened tea.
- **Keep a food journal or use food tracking mobile apps.** These help you to be more aware of what you are actually eating. You may be surprised!

This month, try some new ways to enjoy eating healthy.

Resources:

- [NMCPhC HPW March Tool Box](#)
- [Navyfitness.org](#)

- [NOFFS portion visualization](#)
- [ChooseMyPlate.gov](#)
- [Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics: National Nutrition Month Resources](#)
- [Military Nutrition Environment Assessment Tool \(m-NEAT\)](#)
- [NHLBI Cooking Resources](#)
- [NHLBI Menu Planning Guide](#)
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